

1

Washington Post
"GAO Turns to Alien Turf in Probe"
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GAO Turns to Alien Turf in Probe

Bodies of Space Voyagers Said to Have Disappeared in 1947

By William Claiborne
Washington Post Staff Writer

Where television's "Unsolved Mysteries" has tried and failed, the General Accounting Office is unafraid to venture.

At the request of Rep. Steven Schiff (R-N.M.), Congress's investigative branch has launched a study to determine whether the government covered up a story alleging that the bodies of alien space voyagers were removed from a crashed flying saucer found near Roswell, N.M., in 1947.

After the purported crash of the spacecraft, the bodies of the extraterrestrial visitors were said by a local undertaker and other conspiracy theorists to have been autopsied and secretly flown to an Air Force base in Ohio.

Even though the "Roswell Incident" has been repeatedly dismissed by the Defense Department as nothing more than UFO fantasizing triggered by the discovery of a downed weather balloon, the GAO has begun searching for documents to prove allegations that the Air Force "suppressed" information sought by Schiff.

Schiff is a member of the House Government Operations Committee, which oversees the GAO.

GAO spokeswoman Laura A. Kopelson said the office's investigation, first reported in the Albuquerque Journal yesterday, stemmed from a meeting in October between Schiff and GAO Controller General Charles A. Bowsher. Schiff complained then that the Defense Department had been "unresponsive" to his inquiries about the 1947 incident.

Kopelson said "as far as I know only one investigator had been assigned" to the case, and that not enough work had been done to report any results to Schiff. At another point, Kopelson said "the people doing it are either on sick leave or are unavailable."

She said there was no way of estimating how much the investigation would cost, and that the GAO does not release such information anyway.

GAO conducted 1,380 inquiries into government operations in 1992. Its budget has risen from \$46.9 million in 1965 to \$490 million last year. The agency has been criticized, especially by Republicans, as the "lap dog of the requesters," producing reports that tend to support whatever conclusion the requesting member of Congress suggests.

Kopelson said Schiff had asked the GAO "to see if there is any evidence that information regarding UFOs had been suppressed" following the Roswell incident.

Schiff, however, said that at a routine October meeting he had merely complained about the Defense Department's lack of responsiveness but a GAO official said, "We're willing to take a stab at it."

Schiff, in a telephone interview from Albuquerque, said that last March, after receiving inquiries from "UFO believers" and some Roswell residents who were in the military in 1947, he wrote Defense Secretary Les Aspin asking for more information about the reported spacecraft crash and the alleged disappearance of the aliens' bodies.

The crash of a mysterious object 75 miles northwest of Roswell, which the Air Force later claimed was a weather balloon equipped with a radar-reflecting device, was the subject of several books and remains many UFO buffs' greatest riddle.

A privately owned museum in Roswell contains a number of documents and photographs purporting to prove existence of the aliens. It also displays a re-creation of the spacecraft surrounded by figures portraying the dead extraterrestrials.

UFO buffs contend the incident marked the beginning of a government conspiracy to suppress evidence of alien life.

Much of the speculation stems from claims by William Haut, a former Air Force public affairs officer, who said that on July 2, 1947, he was told to prepare a news release reporting the Air Force had recovered parts of a flying saucer and then was told to change the story to report a weather balloon.

Also, a nurse reportedly told a local funeral home director that she witnessed the autopsies of the spacemen, whom she described as having oversized heads and beetle-like features. The nurse subsequently died in a plane crash.

After the autopsies, conspiracy theorists said the bodies were flown to Fort Worth and then to what is now Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio.

In 1989, NBC's "Unsolved Mysteries" investigated the controversy, which the program's host, Robert Stack, concluded remained unsolved.

Schiff said after calling Aspin last March to request a Defense Department briefing on the Roswell incident, he received a call from an Air Force lieutenant colonel, who brusquely told him the documents had been turned over to the National Archives.

However, Schiff said, Archives officials told him they did not have the records on Roswell, even though they did have records of "Project Blue Book," a 1969 Air Force study of reported



An "alien" depicted on NBC's "Unsolved Mysteries," which concluded case is unsolved.

UFO sightings. That study, Schiff said, did not deal with the Roswell case.

"I was getting pretty upset at all the running around," Schiff said, adding that at his meeting with GAO officials, "they made an offer to help."

"Generally, I'm a skeptic on UFOs and alien beings, but there are indications from the run-around that I got that whatever it was, it wasn't a balloon. Apparently, it's another government coverup," Schiff said.

He called the Defense Department's lack of response "astounding," and said government accountability was an issue "even larger than UFOs."

Asked if the GAO might not be extending itself, Schiff acknowledged that the agency "usually does fiscal investigations and at present I can't find a fiscal impact" in the Roswell incident.

Had the agency said, "This is beyond our realm of expertise," Schiff said, "I wouldn't insist on it." He added, "If the Defense Department had been responsive, it wouldn't have come to this."

2

Letter, with GAO Code 701034
Richard Davis, GAO, to William J.
Perry, DOD
February 9, 1994



United States
General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

REC'D GAO(SFU)
GAO SURVEYS/REVIEWS

National Security and
International Affairs Division

FEB 15 1994

FEB 9 1994

The Honorable William J. Perry
The Secretary of Defense

Attention: DOD Office of the Inspector General
Director for GAO Surveys and Reviews

Dear Mr. Secretary:

In response to a congressional request, the General Accounting Office is initiating a review of DOD's policies and procedures for acquiring, classifying, retaining, and disposing of official government documents dealing with weather balloon, aircraft, and similar crash incidents. The review will involve testing whether DOD, the military services, specialized defense agencies, and others such as the National Archives, have systematically followed the proper procedures to ensure government accountability over such records.

The work will be performed under GAO code 701034 by staff from our National Security Analysis group in Washington, D.C. If you have any questions concerning this assignment, please contact either Mr. Gary Weeter, Assistant Director, at (202) 512-4603 or Mr. Jack Kriethe, Evaluator-in-Charge at (202) 512-4567. This review has been coordinated with Dan Chambers of the Inspector General's Office.

Sincerely yours,

Richard Davis
Director, National Security
Analysis

GAO ENTRANCE CONFERENCE FOR
ASSIGNMENT CODE 701034

ISSUE:

Has the Government met its responsibility in the handling, retention, and subsequent disposition of official records concerning the investigation and reporting of air vehicle and other crash incidents similar to the reported crash of a weather balloon near Roswell, New Mexico in July 1947.

SCOPE:

Initial work will be performed at the Department of Defense, the Services, specialized defense agencies, and other executive branch agencies as required.

APPROACH:

(1) Interview responsible officials and review pertinent directives and regulations to determine the executive branch policies and procedures governing the reporting of air vehicle and similar crash incidents.

(2) Select a sample of crash incidents covering different time periods (1947 to present) to determine whether proper procedures were followed.

(3) For the incidents selected, determine whether proper records management procedures were followed in the retention and subsequent disposition of those records.

(4) Determine the "OFFICIAL" explanation of what has become known as the "Roswell Incident".